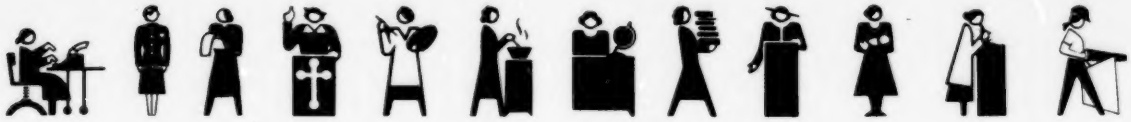

Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women

SUBMISSION TO

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON

BILL C-144, THE CANADA CHILD CARE ACT

September 1988

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women
P.O. Box 745, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2T3

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes the opportunity to address the Legislative Committee on Bill C-144. The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women is an advisory body to the government of Nova Scotia and has over the past 10 years engaged in a wide range of activities to create an awareness of and to improve the status of women in this province. Since our inception, the issue of child care has been a high priority and one about which the Council has made repeated recommendations to both our provincial and the federal governments. We consider child care to be fundamental to women's economic equality. We believe that Bill C-144, the Canada Child Care Act, will be a major step backwards for children and families in Canada and that the Federal Strategy on Child Care will fail to address the child care crisis in Nova Scotia.

Currently in Nova Scotia there are 68,950 children under six years of age. With 55% of Nova Scotian women with children under six years of age in the labour force, there are at least 37,922 Nova Scotian children needing some form of child care. If available spaces were doubled in Nova Scotia over a seven-year period that would yield only 10,576 licensed full-time day care spaces. That will leave at least 27,000 children still in need of some form of care. The growing trend of women with young children entering the labour force is expected to continue to rise

and therefore child care needs by 1995 could be even greater than they are today.

In Nova Scotia, it is estimated that natural growth under the current Canada Assistance Plan would create more spaces by 1995 than Bill C-144 will allow. Bill C-144 introduces new ceilings on child care spending and the notional amounts allotted to provinces may have the effect of restricting expenditure on child care. We strongly recommend that funding under the Canada Child Care Act be an open-ended mechanism that will not restrict expenditure on child care.

We are concerned that the proposed Canada Child Care Act will do little to improve the poor salaries which are currently received by child care workers. In Nova Scotia, a recent survey has revealed that the average annual salary of child care workers is $12,927.1 Average child care salaries in Nova Scotia are 50 - 66% less than salaries of elementary school teachers, despite the fact that most have equivalent amounts of training. The training of child care workers is a crucial element of quality care. We strongly recommend that the Canada Child Care Act include provisions which will allow for substantial increases in the salaries of child care workers.

The absence of stated national standards in Bill C-144 will not ensure that all Canadian families will have

access to comparable services regardless of where they reside. We believe that it is essential that the Canada Child Care Act include criteria which will ensure the quality of child care, not simply increase the number of spaces.

Although there may be some high quality and professionally run private child care facilities we believe there is a basic conflict between quality and profit in child care. The experience of non-profit child care has been that child care cannot be run profitably and maintain quality. Since the basic objective of most business is to maximize profit, then there is a great incentive for private child care to reduce costs as much as possible in order to maximize profits. Since salaries are the largest single budget item in child care, and food is usually the second largest, they are the obvious victims if costs are to be reduced in order to enhance profits. Surveys have shown that salaries in private child care facilities are almost always lower than the already-too-low salaries in non-profit child care. Similarly, food quality (i.e., nutritional quality) has also been shown to be considerably lower in private child care.2 We believe that public monies should not be extended to those who seek profit at the expense of children and child care workers. We recommend that commercial operations be given reasonable opportunity to

convert to non-profit operations.

We are also concerned about the fact that women's groups and child care advocacy groups in Nova Scotia have been denied the opportunity to address the Legislative Committee on Bill C-144. Every attempt should be made to ensure that any Canada Child Care Act is the best possible legislation and most importantly, will lay the foundation for a system of child care which will offer high quality, affordable and accessible care to all families who need it. The federal and provincial governments in Canada have spent many years and many dollars in the form of Task Forces and Special Committees soliciting input on the issue of child care. We can only question why, in the final hour, is a Bill being pushed through the Legislature which virtually disregards all research and recommendations brought forward to date?

FOOTNOTES

1 Wolstenholme, Sue. "Child Care Wages in Nova Scotia; August 16, 1988.

2 This argument was adapted from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia, Election Kit 1988, "Public Money for Day Care for Profit".